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UNCLAS LILONGWE 000392

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [KDEM](#) [PINR](#) [MI](#)

SUBJECT: ELECTIONS: CLERGY COME OUT AGAINST FRONTRUNNER  
MUTHARIKA

REF: A. 03 LILONGWE 1202

[1B.](#) LILONGWE 381

[¶1.](#) (SBU) Presbyterian Church Synod Moderator Reverend Felix Chingota, speaking on behalf of the Presbyterian clergy in Malawi, told poloff that the Presbyterian Church has begun telling its approximately 3.5 million members that "it has difficulties with the United Democratic Front (UDF), and it would prefer a change in government." Chingota said that although the clergy has come out publicly against the UDF and Mutharika, it does not plan to tell its congregations which opposition leader they should vote for.

[¶2.](#) (SBU) The Presbyterian clergy's newly public anti-UDF stance comes as UDF presidential candidate Bingu wa Mutharika attempts to defend himself against opposition claims that he was fired from the COMESA Secretary Generalship for corruption and mismanagement (reftel B). Mutharika announced on May 10 that he plans to take legal action against the two newspapers that reported the "devious fabrication" and the Mgirizano Coalition leaders Gwanda Chakuamba and Sam Kandodo Banda who have repeated the story. The two newspapers have announced that they stand by their stories and have no intention of making retractions. Opposition parties continue to push Mutharika for satisfactory answers to the allegations.

COMMENT

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[¶3.](#) (SBU) Although the Catholic Church has been less public with its anti-UDF message, it is significant that both the Presbyterian and Catholic Churches, which played a central role in bringing down the Banda regime, have come out against the UDF and Mutharika. Considering the influence of the churches, this is not good news for the UDF.

BROWNING